

Mrs. J. G. Hagen, President

JUNE 19, 1972

VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

VOL. I NO. 8

It is with mixed emotions that I begin the June 1972 Newsletter to you. Mrs. Hagen's name continues to appear as president simply because she served us so well, a hard-working lady who loves the Lowndes County Historical Society, one of the Founders who has worked with it from the beginning. We will continue to work together and are most privileged to have had her as our president.

The mixed emotions are that I am president now and I want it to be a big successful year for LCHS, securing for us a larger, firmer place in this city and county. I believe we have been doing the right things so far, writing the right stories in recording our history. We are given more and more artifacts and we believe we are definitely one of the important attractions here. I'm proud to say that James Hall is Vice President, Fredeva Ogletree is Secretary and Mrs. Natalie Williams continues as Treasurer. Our next meeting will be in September when Clyde White will be featured speaker.

I am very much impressed with our last program when Emma Stevens asked for groups to make suggestions for programs. And they are great suggestions and topics. We are looking forward to these papers. I'll always be willing to help you research and we'll all gain important information from them.

I guess my mixed emotions would be knowing the big job ahead. Yet the future is definitely bright. There is much still in store for our Society and Museum and we must work for it. As a 1891 newspaper item reads, "Valdosta is a good place to live, but you've got to hustle!"

Sweet Watermelon Gone Sour

by

Ed Ferrell

In my teen-age days in the first decade of this century, in the South, it was believed the inherent right for young negroes to steal chickens and young whites to steal watermelons. We felt that the good Lord made exceptions for these two commodities as applying in His Commandment "Thou shall not steal". We felt them necessary for our survival and the Psalmist says in the Bible, "Stolen melons are the sweetest and stolen apples taste the best."

During those years, eight of we Valdosta teen-agers were the closest of friends, and under the leadership of our "Natural Born Leader", Will Fender, we devised many means of "Enjoying Life" together. Will insisted that we should become a "Double Quartette" and learn to harmonize and serenade the girls. Will taught us many "Bugs of Harmony" and I'm not sure as to how much our listeners enjoyed our singing, but we eight boys got a real thrill from our singing of the old songs of melody. Our increasing love and enjoyment of our "Double Quartette" stemmed from Will Fender's enthusiastic tutoring. He had a knack of making us think we were good, which I doubt seriously, but there was no doubt that we enjoyed our singing.

During the watermelon season of the summer of 1905, Lee Ashley, one of our Scouts to locate the best watermelon patch in or near Valdosta to serve us, reported much to our glee and satisfaction that Mr. Renfroe who had a large garden on the Northwest corner of Wells and Hill Avenue, had planted the entire garden that year in watermelons, and Lee reported to us that they were luscious looking specimens and just right for picking.

The two story Renfroe home was on the West side of their large garden, and the watermelon patch was fenced in on the two streets with a barbed wire fence about five feet tall.

The eight boys in our crowd were Lee Ashley, Pell Converse, Chip Converse, Will Fender,

Ben Dunbar, John S. Harris, John Young Roberts and Ed Ferrell.

So, as a result of Lee Ashley's report we lost no time in planning our first of a series of watermelon cutting parties. The teen-agers of that day enjoyed "Playing Out" in the evenings during the summer months, and the curfew to get home was until 10 o'clock. Right after supper we rushed to get together to play until then.

The Valdosta Academy Elementary School was located between River and Central Avenue facing Oak Street which was just a nice distance from Mr. Renfroe's watermelon patch, so we selected the grounds back of the school building to eat our melons.

On our first night, things went smoothly, but probably due to a little apprehension of taking much time to get our melons and run the risk of detection we settled with just two melons. This gave each of us a quarter, but we decided that wasn't enough, so the next night we got four and had half a melon each.

It was like "Picking cherries" to get the melons and we didn't hear a sound from the Renfroe house as Lee Ashley and John S. Harris picked the melons from the patch and handed them to those waiting on the outside of the fence. We all decided we had never tasted a sweeter melon and the third night it turned into an eating contest so we decided to get six melons tomorrow night. We had found it so easy we lost sight of any possibility of being caught and became brazened as we hadn't heard a sound any of the three previous nights from the house, so why not take time and get 6 and have plenty. So, the fourth night (a Friday night), Lee and John S. were as usual picking the melons and handing them to those waiting at the barbed wire fence. All of a sudden we heard a shout--"Get out of that field!" coming from the back porch of the home. This was followed with a gun blast that sounded like a cannon, and in a second a second blast. By that time John S had hurdled the fence without touching it and headed North up Wells street ahead of us all. Lee Ashley caught his shirt in the wire getting over the fence and in trying to get it loose was scratched badly by the wire and was bleeding from it. He was last man to get running due to this and we heard him shouting, "I'm shot, I'm shot!" He was bleeding from the wire cut, not badly. As all eight of us were running north up Wells street, John S. Harris was ahead of us all and there was a five foot post on the edge of the unpaved sidewalk to keep the vehicles from cutting across the sidewalk. John S. ran splack into it and it hit him in the stomach and he bounced off it like a rubber ball into a mud puddle at the corner, as it had rained that day. As we all passed poor John S. we could hear him moaning until we got out of ear shot. The breath was knocked out of him and he wasn't badly hurt and got up and ran after a few seconds, all splattered with mud. Lee Ashley's grandmother lived on the corner of Wells and Central Avenue just two blocks away from the Renfroes, so Lee cut into his Grandmother's backyard and into the back door of their house. They heard somebody coming in and after a search found Lee in the dining room closet. The rest of us had turned into Central Avenue heading East and by that time I had taken over the lead and held it until we got to the corner of Toombs Street at the Baptist Church corner and headed South for the Valdes Hotel and home and the others kept running for Patterson Street.

It was then only a little after 8 o'clock, and my bedtime was 10, but I went right to my room. Claude and I roomed next to Mother and Father with a bath between, and Mother heard me come in my room. She was disturbed as she feared something was wrong with me. She asked if I was sick and I told her I was just tired, was my reason for going to bed so early. She comforted me and told me to go to bed, with a goodnight kiss, and get a good night's sleep. I went to bed but "Somethin' Was on My Mind" and I couldn't get to sleep for quite a while.

The next afternoon Lee Ashley got in touch with me to let me know that the Valdosta Times had written up the incident with big headlines and Mr. Renfroe told the Times he didn't mind us getting one or two watermelons, but when he found out we were getting into the wholesale business he decided to "Call Off" the party. He had seen us the night before, but kept quiet and decided to wait for our return the next night, and give us a warm welcome.

The Valdes Hotel took four copies of the Times paper and I waited in the front to catch the paper boy and got the four papers and put them in the trash can. Father had to send a bellboy to the Times office to tell them they failed to deliver our papers. It never dawned on Mother that I could have been in the bunches described in the paper as she put me to bed early. All of us were afraid to even discuss our experience between ourselves, in playing innocent. I lost my taste for watermelons for all that summer, and I can honestly say I

haven't stolen a watermelon since that night in the summer of 05.

P. S. I failed to mention that there were 6 or 8 shots fired in quick succession. It was a waste of ammunition as the first two shots scared us to death.

Ed Ferrell

Thank you again, Mr. Ferrell, for this story and your other stories. They are really great. I'm sure this one brings back memories to quite a few of us! And I thought June a proper time to use this story. Isn't it almost melon-time? I remember "Playing Out", for we called it that also. "Kick-the-Cans" was one of our favorite games.

Mrs. Lewis W. Williams of Birmingham, Ala. has sent our Society some valuable information and pictures. We have a very nice picture of her father, William H. Griffin, and a post card picture of their home on Troup Street (412, North). Mrs. Williams (Margaret Griffin of Valdosta) and her husband have written a book, "Blood Lines of Williams and Griffin". They will publish soon and we will want a copy of this book. There is much Lowndes County history in it. They have sent us some sketches (excerpts) from the book. William Griffin's mother had been Nancy Henrietta Belote, daughter of Alfred Belote, one of the earliest settlers here. William's sister Nancy Henrietta Griffin married Edwin James Lamb and their daughter, Lilla, married Frank Remington Parramore, parents of Redden Parramore. So you see how interesting this is going to be. Our thanks to Mr. & Mrs. Williams for this addition to Lowndes County and for their efforts in this work.

Just a word to our reluctant members, friends and relatives. So many of you, when approached about your family history, say, "Oh, I don't know, I don't want to push my family forward." "I don't want people to think I'm trying to push my family." Just let me say this, who is going to do it and preserve your family's history if you don't. Now just think about it. You are the one who has the stories, date and facts. Write it down, or ask some of our members to help you with it. We are pleading for your family history. Once you get started on it, I promise you, you will enjoy it so much, you won't want to stop. I was second to do my family history, and I was proud to do it. What I put in our "History of the People of Lowndes County", will be much longer than what I read to you members.

Here are some interesting notes from "Mayor and Council Meetings":

June 1889, "Boys and others getting off and on cars and engines at depot other than passengers and employees shall be fined \$5.00 - \$25.00 or be made to work upon streets of Valdosta not less than 5 and not more than 25 days.

October 1889, "H. J. Sandlin appeared before the council in behalf of the Patterson Fire Company and asked for 400 feet more of hose, whereupon mayor was authorized to purchase 200 feet of hose."

April 1890, "Mr. M. B. Lane appeared before council and made some propositions, relative to furnishing the town with electric lights--whereupon Mayor W. L. Thomas and councilmen J. O. Varnedoe and B. W. Bentley were appointed a committee of three to confer with Mr. Lane in regard to the matter and report to council."

(These are all written just as from the original.)

May 1890, "The Mayor was authorized to execute a contract with Mr. M. B. Lane for electric lights, the plant to be installed and the lights turned on within ninety days."

"Lights are to be placed at junctions of the streets, or in the streets, as may be desired, to be suspended in center of same. The said lights are to be lighted every night at twilight and turned out every morning at twilight."

May 1889, "Mr. W. P. Renfroe was denied the privilege of erecting an awning on a alley as it would possibly prove an obstruction to travel."

(From all accounts, Mr. W. P. Renfroe operated a business which engaged in the sale of "spirituous liquors". His place was called, "The Gilt Edge".

Is this the same Mr. Renfroe who had the irresistible watermelon field?)

There are more but space is gone--and our letter will continue this summer. Write to us. Tell us what you'd like to read as a story in the Newsletter. We'll do our best to make you happy.

Albert Pendleton